

## **How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base.**

Gallwch ychwanegu'ch targedau o'ch aseiniad diwethaf (Ond yn berthnasol os yr ydych wedi cwblhau aseiniad) / Please add your targets from the previous assignment (Only relevant if you have completed an assignment)

|                    |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | Targed/target                                                                                                 | Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn<br>What I have done in this assignment...                                                                                       |
| Targed/Target<br>1 | Ensure that you structure your work carefully, drawing together similar points into longer paragraphs.        | Considered my use of paragraphs ensuring that the structure is not broken up and flows correctly.                                                                             |
| Targed/Target<br>2 | Undertake further reading in order to ensure that your understanding (e.g. of quantitative data) is accurate. | I have re considered my representation of quantitative research from my previous assignment and altered my understanding gaining further insight through reading and sources. |
| Targed/Target<br>3 | Consider and adhere to Harvard referencing guidelines                                                         | I have used the university document to support my referencing.                                                                                                                |

This assignment aims to consider and reflect upon a school development plan (SDP). Schools adopt many strategies to try and constantly improve provision and standards, primarily SDP's. The vision of a school is integral to lead school improvement. This is done through continuous reflection of strategies taking place and the impact these are having based on responses from staff, students and data. MacGilchrist and Mortimore (2006) suggest that SDP's are considered a strategy for school improvement with direct links between classroom practice and culture, areas for development, pupil voice and learning and planning. The SDP plan that I will be analysing is from a school in the Vale of Glamorgan. This school has around 400 pupils on roll including 65 Part time Nursery pupils. In addition to this around 36% of children are eligible for free school meals. This is much higher than the average for Wales which sits at 19%. This school also identifies 31% of children to have additional learning needs (Estyn Report for school X, 2017). These statistics would suggest that many of the children in this school could be considered to be vulnerable and the surrounding area disadvantaged. I will aim to examine the strategic planning that the school have put in place along with action points, in order to develop a positive impact on the pupils learning and well-being.

SDP's are working documents which allow the school to gain ownership and sense of responsibility for the future vision of their school. An SDP is put into place to promote school change and ensure that the rights of every child to an education are met. Catholic Relief services (2009, pg. 8) highlight the importance of a School development plan. They argue that the primary goal of this document is to create an inclusive school environment that "fosters learning and nurtures participative, responsible children and citizens". Implementing the rights of the child into a school development plan along with strategies and areas for improvement, specific to the children within the school, can be used to enhance a quality education for all.

The Education regulations for Wales (school development plans, 2014) provides a guide for school staff to follow in regard to the SDP. Within this document is guidance for interpretation of content. This highlights areas for each school to consider and reflect upon in relation to development and progress. These vary from standards in literacy and numeracy, reducing the effect of poverty on educational attainment, attainment results, comparative information, assessments, staff and any school priorities which may support the learning of the children. It is made clear that

this document is to be produced by stakeholders who must also monitor and review changes. It also suggests that in preparation to revise the school's development plan, a number of contributors must be consulted; head teacher, pupils, parents, school staff and other governors. This is something which is considered and reflected in the development of School X's SDP each year.

Hargreaves and Hopkins (2004) suggest that a school development plan allows successful management for change within a school. They argue that when arranging to plan out an SDP, the school must consider the cycle of development; implementation, evaluation, audit and construction. This structure allows the staff in that school to ask and reflect upon key questions, changes that need to be made, how to manage these changes and the impact they have. This cycle is a direct reflection of the structure of SDP's put forward within the Education Regulations document (school development plans, 2014). In terms of the SDP cycle, the audit, or in other words reflection on strengths and weaknesses is particularly important. Critical reflection within teaching is crucial in order to ensure that decisions that have been made can be supported through successes or improved based on areas of misstep. Yost, Sentner and Forlenza-Bailey (2000) believe that in order for teachers to be able to meet the challenges that are faced in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools, they need to have moral, intellectual and critical reflection skills. Dewey (1933) suggests that reflective individuals have three attributes; open mindedness, responsibility and whole heartedness. These allow teachers to listen to and consider all sides of an issue, give alternate opinions and views to make a decision, actively search for truth applying this to the problem and take risks within plans to improve the school. All of these attributes are crucial for producing an SDP that takes into account everybody involved, and considers problem solving from multiple points of view. This creates a representative document for the whole school.

Although in many cases this planning can be seen as beneficial, it could be argued that the complexity of following this planning could hold some difficulties within some cases. Janssen et. al. (2013) refers to the strategic use of professional development plans in teaching. They suggest that whilst it can have impact for development this is reliant on the views of the individuals it was focused on. They call upon research by Imhof and Picard (2009) who suggest that if a teacher has a strong proactive attitude, they will respond to the planning better than

others. This suggests that individual practitioners could respond to reflections on development differently. In the context of an SDP, this is also applicable. Key targets need to be understood and reflected upon by all members of staff in order for the document to make a developmental impact. It is crucial that the information is received and reviewed in the same manner by all staff.

When reviewing the SDP with the schools governing body, it is crucial to use data collected throughout the year in order to make valid assessments and ensure accountability for initiatives. The department of education (2011) suggest effective use of data is a significant form of assessment for improvement. It is important to compare the data outcomes to standards within the school. These comparisons can be made with previous years, performance throughout the curriculum, performance within social class in the same year group and any trends evident.

This highlights what is working and what needs adjustment. Contextual elements that may affect the children, for example external contributors can be taken into account. The types of data that are used are both hard (quantitative) and soft (qualitative) data methods. Resulting in comprehensive, broad breadth of findings to inform decisions (Giddings and Grant, 2006). Triangulating these results from a series of data collections, results, statistics and personal opinions and responses, can allow for more and better information. Converging this data is the basis of further decision making.

Promoting Foundation Phase pedagogy and social inclusion and independence across all Phases is a priority for School X. This process begins by assessing the learning environments in preparation to develop these into high functioning learning spaces. Williams (2003) suggests that upon children entering school, they will have a motivation to learn and some will be more eager to show their independence than others. She continues that modern pedagogy suggests that children should be aware of their own thought processes and teachers should be aware of this and facilitate experiences for the child to become more meta cognitive. It is pivotal school provides a climate for children to reach their individual potential increasing independence and collective responsibility. The Welsh Gov document for the new curriculum (2020, Developing a vision for curriculum design) highlights the importance of developing skills in independence. It suggests that children should have the opportunity to progress their emotional independence

and well-being along with transferring skills and making connections within their learning.

The starting point for planning and altering an SDP is self-evaluation from key workers within the school. Scheerens (2002, cited in McNamara and O'Hara, 2008, p.174) defines evaluation within education as judging the value of initiatives based on evidence gathered to support decision making and learning. School X used this method to analyse a series of gathered information about independent learning across all phases. These results informed priorities for change enabling improved learning spaces that promote independence and high functioning learners. The information for the SDP was gathered through a series of soft data monitoring activities. These were lesson observations of independent learning areas assessing how they are being used and interviews with teachers and pupils considering their opinions on the open learning spaces. McGivney (2000) argues the importance of listening to learners in order to inform decision making. She suggests that not only does this give the pupils responsibility and ownership for their own learning, but also widens the spectrum of adult learning. Upon data analysis it was decided that this was a school priority. The senior members of staff concluded that when left to work independently in these areas, the children were often not using the space for what it is intended. Lakin (2013) supports the notion of independent learning opportunities enriching learning experiences. She states that deep learning can only take place when the children have taken ownership of the learning process. In order for pupils to have this opportunity, they must be exposed to information which will motivate and engage them. The data collected could suggest that these areas need more of a purpose in order to make them an engaging zone for independent learning. However, in many cases the children will need to be taught the skills that will allow them to undertake independent learning effectively which, in some instances, can pose a problem. In order for the data that is collected to be applied effectively, all members of staff need to have a clear understanding of what independent learning looks like as a whole school initiative. Meyer et al. (2008) review the broad descriptions of independent learning arguing that in some instances it could be considered the process of developing attitude knowledge and skills to make responsible decisions. Other definitions argue that independent learning is about the learning being personal to the child and growing from their mistakes. In

order for the data that has been gathered by senior staff to be applied accurately, it needs to be made clear how the school will adopt this progress as a whole school initiative.

When implementing a whole school initiative for progress, it is important as a school to consider who needs to be involved in the decision making. Thompson and McKelvy (2007) researched shared vision and team learning. They concluded that in order for a school to develop a culture of trust, risk-taking and support, professional learning needs to take place with a clear vision and understanding by all staff. These findings support the methods completed by school X in including stakeholders' opinions on the learning spaces. Once this was highlighted as an area of development, teachers, pupils and other members of staff working within these areas were asked their opinions and reflections. Allowing the staff to feel a sense of ownership of the key inquiry will then in turn give the initiative a stronger holding point. If the staff believe in methodology, it becomes more likely that they will strive to achieve a successful outcome for the target. Discussions with stakeholders leads to a series of strategic planning actions for improvement in this area. The initial starting point for this was for staff to work co-operatively coaching each other in triads across phases. Teacher collaboration is promoted as being essential to teacher learning and enhancing pupils' achievement and outcomes (Brownell et al., 2006; Lingo, Barton-Arwood and Jolivet, 2011). Allowing staff to learn across phases from each other, will promote the key inquiry to evolve and result in staff creating successful independent learning space. Teacher collaboration along with integral research further inform strategic actions plans. It is crucial that this document is then considered to be a live document with constant review of key inquiries to see if what is being implemented is working.

In order to assess the impact of the measures put into place, it is important for senior members of staff to review all affected elements. This can be done via the M.E.R. cycle; Monitoring, Evaluation and Review. Quintin Kynaston (2016, pg. 1) describes this cycle as key in decision making by schools in relation to standards, quality and school Improvement; "astute evidence-based self-evaluation, rooted in systematic monitoring, which is insightful and includes analysis of data." Results from this monitoring take into account responses from staff and pupils and the work that is produced in these areas. This will allow senior members of staff to measure impact and success.

To evaluate School X's SDP process and outcomes, I will begin with the successes of self-evaluation and inclusion of stakeholders. This evaluation into the schools independent learning areas, allowed for clear development. Within his report 'Successful Futures' Donaldson (2015) suggests that children should have the opportunity to become ambitious capable learners who are able to explore, apply knowledge, solve problems and interpret data. Successful administration of independent learning within pupils will allow them to achieve this purpose. Including stakeholders' opinions and reflections in the findings is a successful strategy for planning the SDP. Each year School X holds an SDP reflection and planning day which allows all stakeholders within the school; staff, children, governors, members of the community who are regularly involved, to talk to each other about what they think needs to happen and promote culture for change. It is from this the key inquiry is produced for the SDP. Although this is a successful process for highlighting areas for improvement, it could be argued that the way in which School X have set out their targets in their SDP could prove difficult for staff to achieve. For example, there are no timescales for measuring achievement along with no financial restrictions. Hodgson, Broadhead and Dunford (1994) make reference to finances and SDP's. They reiterate that it is the Head Teacher and governors who handle school financing and need to do so in a well-rounded way to ensure that all projects can be funded. Creating new learning spaces around the school will need to be budgeted. The lack of guidance towards this in the SDP may result in difficulties producing an area that is desired and achievable. However, it could be argued that this open-ended style of SDP, although in some instances hard to keep on top of, is successful in allowing teachers to add their own additional research to key inquiries, be more creative and have personal ownership. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) are advocates for teachers becoming professional researchers in education. They suggest that promoting regular inquiry in the classroom will enhance the education system.

Future suggestions for the format of School X's SDP would be for the research element to progress further and visit other schools to observe good practice and ideas relating to their key inquiry. The Welsh Government document (schools as a learning organisation, 2018) highlights the importance of schools collaborating and working together. An open-door policy to exchange knowledge and form

partnerships will ensure equality and mutual learning opportunities for all. A final suggestion for the SDP would be, through distributed leadership, staff are able to evaluate success and upload monitoring activities and research, to the SDP as a live document. This will provide instant feedback to the senior members of staff who are constantly reviewing and assessing this key inquiry.

In conclusion, I have been able to consider and evaluate the school development plan of School X where I carried out my PGCE placements for PTE 1. This assignment, along with experiences from PTE have allowed me to gain a clear insight into how this school sets targets and achieves them. Through SDP planning days, they critically evaluate and reflect upon areas of improvement both in their classes and key stages. I have considered their key inquiry of promoting independent learning and independent learning spaces across all phases. The ways this can be observed, adapted and reflected upon have been reviewed for the children to experience optimum learning in independent environments. I understand how the SDP is a live document which is constantly changing and evolving to best support the schools' ethos and goals. This example of the M.E.R. cycle; monitoring, evaluation and review will be crucial in informing my future pedagogy allowing me to reflect upon my practice, research and apply findings and review progress. The SDP allows for effective distributed leadership throughout a school along with a sense of ownership for strategies that are in place. The research and understanding from this assignment will help to prepare me for participation in this during future endeavours.

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